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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LISBON 002229

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SUBJECT: IN BEIRUT, AMADO UNDERSCORES EU INTEREST IN
UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Classified By: Acting Pol/Econ Counselor Cari Enav for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

Summary

1. (C) FM Luis Amado traveled to Beirut on August 22-23 to express EU concern about Lebanon's upcoming elections. He and his staff spoke with a variety of leaders, including PM Siniora and Speaker Berri, and encouraged all sides to act responsibly and engage constructively. His staff also traveled to Syria to express EU concern about developments in the region. They underscored that the Lebanese elections provided an excellent opportunity for Syria to demonstrate that it wanted to be "part of the solution, not the problem." Amado's staff was also critical of Syria's close relationship with Iran -- which the Syrians blamed on their international isolation.

Meetings

2. (SBU) Traveling directly from the Balkans, FM Luis Amado visited Beirut on August 22-23 and met with Lebanese PM Fouad Siniora and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri. His Special Envoy to the Middle East Almeida Sampaio and MFA Middle East Director Isabel Pedrosa stayed on to meet with the Maronite Patriarch, Berri's Senior Political Advisor, Hezbollah's Parliamentary Leader, Presidential Candidate Lahoud, and MP Michele Aoun. Sampaio and Pedrosa continued on to Damascus where they met with the Vice Foreign Minister for European Affairs, the FM's Chief of Staff, the Vice Prime Minister for Economic Reform and the local EU Presidency Representative. (Note: The French are representing the EU Presidency in Damascus because Portugal does not have an embassy there.)

EU Concern for Lebanese Elections

3. (C) Speaking with a variety of leaders, FM Luis Amado expressed EU concern about Lebanon's upcoming elections. He encouraged all sides to act responsibly and engage constructively. Despite differing constitutional interpretations, Speaker Berri informed Amado that he planned to convene Parliament on September 25 to begin consensus building to form a national unity government. Pedrosa acknowledged it will be very difficult to reconcile the opposition's view that Parliament needs a two-thirds majority to present a candidate with the March 14 Group's view that, absent consensus, Parliament only needs 50% of MPs plus one. Given the potential for violence and the need to maintain regional stability, Amado expressed a sense of urgency for all sides to reach a compromise.

4. (C) The opposition told Amado that Siniora was too comfortable due to strong U.S. and EU backing and did not feel it necessary to compromise and form a national unity government. March 14 interlocutors, on the other hand,

expressed concerned that a national unity government would give the minority a blocking veto. They also wanted guarantees that Shia ministers would not resign for any mutually agreed-upon future government.

Nahr al-Bared almost Over / Grateful for UNIFIL contribution

15. (C) Siniora told Amado that he was concerned about the Nahr al-Bared situation which had been "imposed" upon the Lebanese. The government was proceeding very cautiously and felt it had reached the final stages of conflict. Siniora added that it had been necessary to take a stand now to prevent a string of future confrontations. He also expressed concern with Syria's role in the country and thanked the EU for its continued UNIFIL participation in southern Lebanon.

Time for Syria to Ante Up

16. (C) Almeida Sampaio and Pedrosa continued on to Damascus where they expressed strong EU concern about the current situation in the region. They underscored that the Lebanese elections provided an excellent opportunity for Syria to demonstrate it wanted to be "part of the solution, not the problem." They encouraged Syria to act responsibly and help ensure that its neighbor was able to conduct peaceful elections. Almeida Sampaio and Pedrosa also stressed the importance of Syria's role in ensuring a secure environment for the UNIFIL mission.

Iran -- the Only Girl Willing to Look Syria's Way

17. (C) In response to strong EU criticism of Syria's close association with Iran, Syrian interlocutors noted that its relationship was due in large part to Syria's international

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isolation. They were highly critical of the West's attempt to isolate the Syria, claiming that this policy "had forced it to date the only girl that would look its way - even if she were unattractive."

Comment

18. (C) The Portuguese EU Presidency remains focused on events in the Middle East as evidenced by the Foreign Minister's frequent trips to the region and the recent joint demarche on foreign fighters in Syria (septel). Pedrosa commented that Portugal was skeptical of Syria's intentions to act responsibly. Therefore, she said, it was necessary for the EU to keep the pressure on. Amado is scheduled to travel to Israel and Ramallah on September 10-11.
Ballard